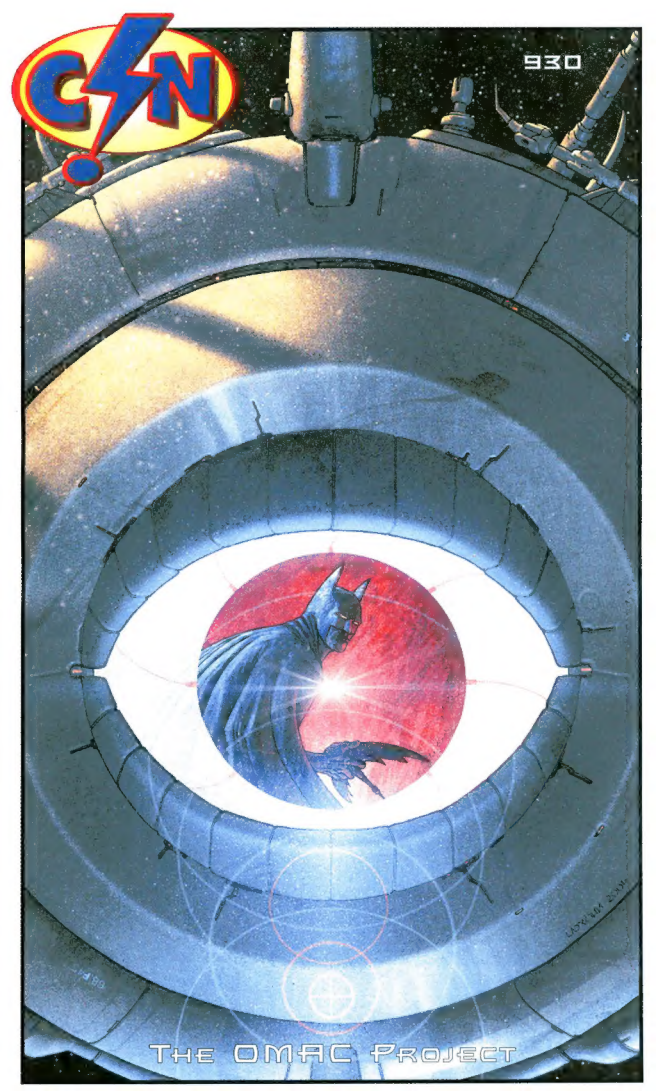
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THE OMAC PROJECT

There's a Crisis on the Horizon...

The word is out, and now we all know what ***DC Countdown*** is counting down *to*. There's an ***Infinite Crisis*** looming... and there are several major miniseries leading up to it. But how do these series relate? That's the question that everyone is wondering in the aftermath of ***DC Countdown to Infinite Crisis***' shocking revelations—and it's the question that ***Countdown*** co-writer and ***OMAC Project*** author *Greg Rucka* is new able to discuss.

"It's pretty simple," Rucka said. "If ***Countdown*** is the ***Countdown to Infinite Crisis***, then ***The OMAC Project***, coming as it does, out of the pages of ***Countdown***, is clearly tied to that. If I say how, that would give away too much—but essentially, what ***Countdown to Infinite Crisis*** does is that it reveals the movement of a faction within the DC Universe that means ill. ***The OMAC Project*** is a further examination of that particular faction. You get to see exactly how powerful they are, exactly what they're capable of doing, and exactly how far they'll go to get it. They are ruthless enough that they actually remind you of Lex Luthor when he was a bad guy – before he was the President..."

While he was reluctant to reveal to much, Rucka did add that "the Black King ain't anybody's friend. You're *with* the Black King, or you're *against* the Black King. If you're *with* him, you want to stay there—and if you're *against* him, you'd best make sure your personal effects are in order. You mess with the Black King; you'd best bring your own body bag."

Of course, with the revelation that there's an ***Infinite Crisis*** added to the title of what was originally thought to just be called ***DC Countdown***, Rucka is now free to admit that he and his fellow ***Countdown*** writers *Geoff Johns* and *Judd Winick* have been holding back for the past few months whenever they discussed ***Countdown*** and its spinoffs.

"We *all* became students at the *Geoff Johns* school of 'no comment,'" Rucka said. "The point all along—and we said this in that early interview—for God's sake, *let yourself be surprised!* Enjoy the fact that on Wednesday; a new issue of the story comes out. You don't *have* to know how it's all going to end to enjoy it. Not everybody needs a spoiler!"

Rucka is particularly mum concerning the nature of the forthcoming ***Infinite Crisis***, saying that all he can do is repeat what *Dan DiDio* has said: "'It is the worst day in the DC Universe *ever*.' You can define that in any number of ways," Rucka said. "It's going to all start coming apart. When the pillars of the DC Universe stop functioning together, bad stuff gets *awful*, and good stuff gets *bad*. At their heart, that's what the stories we're all telling are about."

And while the connections to last year's ***Identity Crisis*** in the DCU so far have been made with a rather light touch, that's all changing, as the current Dr. Light storyline in ***Teen Titans*** shows. Likewise, the storyline of ***The OMAC Project*** draws directly upon the aftermath of ***Identity Crisis***.

"The damage you get from ***Identity Crisis***—the trauma that was inflicted upon the characters, both in terms of present continuity and revised past continuity—it's something that has to be addressed," Rucka said. "***The OMAC Project*** is a story that, in part, is about Batman's reaction to the Dr. Light incident being absolutely corrupted for an evil purpose. That corruption never would've happened if the ***Identity Crisis*** event wouldn't have happened, which led Bruce to do what he's done."

So...wait...Batman is responsible for the badness that goes down in ***The OMAC Project***?... or...if the decision to have Zatanna mindwipe Dr. Light had never been made?... Now you're starting to see the ramifications of last year's landmark series.

"*Brad [Meltzer]* stuck a knife in the chest of the DCU with ***Identity Crisis***," Rucka said. "And I say that as someone who loves ***Identity Crisis***. He didn't kill it, but he delivered a wound. If a wound isn't treated, it gets infected. Well, this wound wasn't treated for years. And Bruce Wayne has been nursing a hurt... and it's a hell of a hurt."

The OMAC Project will fill in some of the blanks left by ***Identity Crisis*** since the conclusion of the series—blanks such as what Bruce knew when... and what does he know now? According to Rucka, none of the answers are good.

"In the second issue of ***The OMAC Project***, Batman relates how his memory of the incident came back, and it isn't a bolt of lightning thing," Rucka said. "Life happens, and when life happens, things happen that can act as triggers. He didn't wake up one morning, and yell, 'Oh my God! I remember!' but you can't take ten minutes out of the world's greatest detective's head and not expect him to eventually find that missing time. In the issue, he says that he's the master of only one thing, and that's my mind. He can't even control his body—one day it will ultimately betray him... get older and slower. But the one thing that Bruce has got—and he's got more than anybody else, because he's worked it more than anybody else—is his *mind*, and the control he has over it. You can't mess with it, and think that he wouldn't notice. He *noticed*. He *reacted*.

"And he *responded*."

And what about the "infected wound" metaphor that Rucka mentioned earlier? As ***Countdown*** and ***Teen Titans*** have already revealed, that wound is causing problems across the DC Universe.

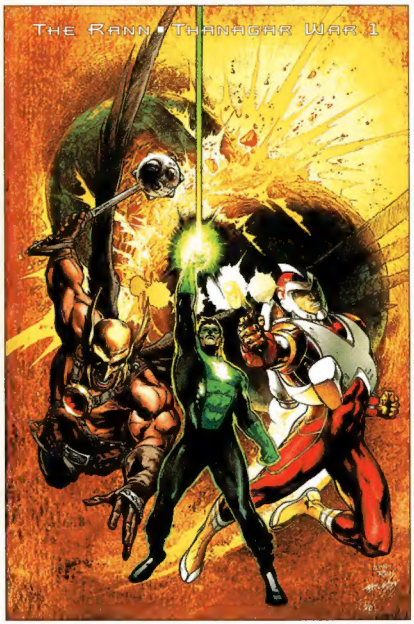
"***Identity Crisis*** caused multiple fractures—you've got characters questioning how others are planning to resolve issues and how those resolutions are any better than those of others, since the resolution of one issue that many trusted heroes agreed to has resulted in massive, universe-shaking aftereffects. And that's a problem.

"At the end of the day, the thing that elevates the DC heroes is that they are *trusting* heroes. The DC Universe is the universe that allows for trust. There's betrayal in the universe, of course, but it's built on and functions on the fact that Wonder Woman can trust Superman, who can trust Batman—and that extends on down through the respective families. Every now and then, something happens, and that trust gets a little shaky, but we've rarely seen it broken between every group, and it's breaking. That's a horribly painful thing.

"And if you're a villain with half a brain, and can read the signs, you can exploit that."

On the editorial side, the planning for ***Countdown***, the four miniseries, ***The Return of Donna Troy***, and ultimately, this fall's ***Infinite Crisis*** has been going on for well over a year at this point—and in fact that planning continues to this day.

"This all started in January of 2004," Rucka said. "Somewhere, Dan has pictures of us in this big room with these giant pieces of paper on the wall, with all of this mapped out, and the names of the miniseries are at the top. The one piece that was missing, as we said earlier, was ***Countdown***. We knew everything else, but we were missing *that one piece* to tie it all together. We had the structure, but were missing the keystone.



"There were certain things where we wanted a specific effect, and went for that, but in many, many others, we found the logical extrapolations of what was already going on – if *this* happens, then *this* would follow, then *this*, and *this* and *this*."

That said, Rucka stressed that the plan that was devised in January of last year hasn't been static. As stories have unfolded in the DCU, the larger picture has had to change and adjust with it.

"A good example of the changes this has seen is ***Amazons Attack***, which was going to be the fifth miniseries, and a crucial piece to the larger storyline," the writer said. "But there was a change made in September, and it took us until January, but we finally did realize that that change removed the need for ***Amazons Attack***. It wouldn't serve the story, and would be redundant. It sucked for the writer on that project in particular [Rucka's wife, *Jen Van Meter*], but it speaks well of the overall project in that we're not playing little darlings and keeping everything.

"That's the other thing – we're not playing the market -share game. We're giving readers the best stories we can give them, and we're giving them stories that will stand apart—but viewed together, will build to ***Infinite Crisis***.

"Dan is very inspiring when he talks about wanting to get people excited about Wednesday. I remember that feeling, and I can say without any hesitation that's what we're all trying to do with all these stories—we want to give people a *reason*, a *desire*, an *excitement* to get into the stores on Wednesday and get their comics, and see what's happening, and how the story is moving along. If we can do that—get people excited to come into shops and get the latest issue because they want to read a good story, not because they're scared the issue will sell out and the retailer can't get more. I think we'll be doing the job we set out to do."

Day of Vengeance #1, the first ***DC Countdown to Infinite Crisis*** spinoff, should be in comic shops already. ***The OMAC Project #1*** follows on April 27th. ***Villains United #1*** is scheduled for May 4th release, while the fourth miniseries, ***The Rann/Thanagar War #1***, debuts on May 11th. ***The Return of Donna Troy***, a four-issue limited series that will also have links to ***Infinite Crisis***, follows in June.

BY MATT BRADY (WITH CLIFF BIGGERS)

Courtesy your friendly neighborhood comics outlet!

& & DCP

Comic Shop Newsarama

Produced by ***Comic Shop News*** in cooperation with *Matt Brady* and *newsarama.com*

1 Spy G1 Spy

Everyone knows that famous secret agent of the cold war era—but the hot wars had spies of their own... and one of those spies is the focus of ***G.I. Spy***, a new series by *Andrew Cosby & Matt Haley* that's coming this summer from Boom! Studios.

G.I. Spy is a war-behind-the-war story which follows America's first counterintelligence agent as he uncovers Hitler's secret 'wonder weapons' program, which if left unchecked could give the Nazis the edge and allow them to actually win the Second World War—and rule the world.

"It's basically 'James Bond meets Indiana Jones', with Albert Einstein as "Q", and World War II as the backdrop," co-creator Cosby said. "It's a genre hybrid that blends the pulp adventure of ***Raiders of the Lost Ark*** and ***The Mummy*** with the edge of modern-day spy thrillers like ***The Bourne Supremacy***. The idea behind the series was to give the reader a glimpse of what the history books *don't* tell us, as seen through the eyes of this American secret agent who saved our collective bacon over and over again."

"The feedback we've gotten from soldiers who've seen the book and the website is 100% positive—they love it!" Haley added. "I just wish there was a way to get more copies in their hands, it's something they can read no matter where they are."

The star of the book is American G.I. and ace fighter pilot Jack Shepherd, a bit of a rookie to the spy game, who's not the suave, perfect James Bond type. Untested and a bit naive, his patriotism is the main motivator that drives him.

While the story and characters are completely fictional, there is one member of the cast who's very much a real person: Albert Einstein, who serves as Jack's mentor and creates all manner of bizarre gadgets for the newly-minted superspy. "He's right at the heart of this comic series, ultimately becoming a kind of father figure to Jack," Cosby said. "I mean, here's this pacifist who inadvertently helped to create the most destructive device known to man. That makes for great internal conflict and drama."

Jack's rival in the series is Kaitlin Hunter, a beautiful, by-the-book British agent who is Jack's opposite in every way, having the experience and training that Jack doesn't. Her background is with the Special Operations Executive, forerunner of MI-6.

G.I. Spy #1 is slated for July release; a special ***G.I. Spy: Eyes Only Preview*** is available now.

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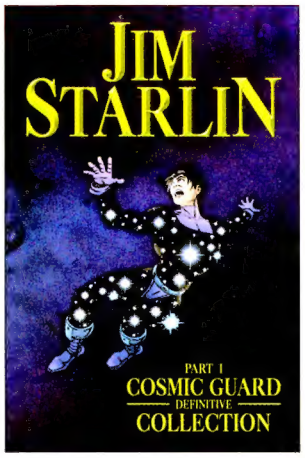


Cosmic Shop News

Cosmic Guard, the *Jim Starlin* series that marked Dynamite Entertainment's entry into comics publishing, returns in trade paperback format this spring.

The six-issue limited series by comics' cosmic master captures the sense of wonder of Starlin's acclaimed ***Dreadstar*** and ***Thanos***. The saga stars a young orphan who is chosen by a mysterious light from space to become the latest in a long line of cosmic guardians, super-powered defenders who are charged with protecting the galaxy.

"Starlin is one of the true masters of the comic book," Dynamite's *J. Allen* said. "This collected edition will find a home alongside Starlin's other legendary creation—***Dreadstar***—in any reader's library."

Cosmic Guard, a 144-page trade paperback that complements the limited series with a cover gallery and bonus materials, is scheduled for May release.

After Midnight

Alan Moore & Kevin O'Neill aren't the only comic book creators to blend characters from different fictional worlds—and in fact, creators *Tony Lee, Ryan Stegman, & Don MacKinnon* are doing them one better in that they're not only including some famous fictional creations from the *past*, but at least one character from the fertile imagination of one of contemporary science fiction and fantasy's most creative talents. So who is it? We'll get to that soon enough...

Midnight Kiss, slated to debut this summer from AP Comics, begins modestly enough... but before the end of the first issue, the series takes some surprising twists and turns.

"One of the things I wanted to do with ***Midnight Kiss*** was actually make something that couldn't easily be shoehorned," Lee told ***Comic Shop Newsarama's*** *Benjamin Ong Pang Kean*. "Back story for the comic is as follows: thousands and thousands of years ago this was a world of magic, and creatures of magic—Fae, Unicorns, Demons, Angels, that kind of thing—all lived together, but not in a sitcom kind of way. For centuries everything is fine.

"Then one day, man comes along.

"Now man is different, because man is rational. The creatures of magic can't relate to man - and man's quite happy to kill them.

"So the five Lords of Fae, the rulers of the land meet to discuss what to do with man. And it's a split vote. Two want to kill man, two want to step back and let man have his time in the spotlight and the fifth is found seemingly murdered. The realm of magic goes into civil war and at the same point in time two totally opposite rituals go off, both working, both negating the other, and both shattering the realm into thousands upon thousands of multi-worlds, each one sharing the same time and space, but invisible unless you know how to see them.

'So now we go to present day, and the world we know is totally rational. But the other worlds are still there—they infect our dreams, our subconscious... figures of legend stem from figures in other realms, that kind of thing—but we're too rational to believe something like that could happen. It's a well used style of tale—*Neil Gaiman* did a very similar thing to London in ***Neverwhere***, where there's this sub level of people who the 'real' world never see.

"So in this multi-world there are people who can move from realm to realm, and they either try to right wrongs or manipulate for power. During the story you see people you know from other books, purely because the books are based on their realms."

"The first arc is based around three characters—Matthew Sable, Nightmare De'Lacy and a teenager called Billy Hart - yet they're chased by a variety of characters including the supernatural hitmen Jonny Cool and the Flickman. Now these two in a later story get their own tale. And others that are met take the center stage.

"Matthew Sable is young, enigmatic and personable—and he has an ability to weave glamour, the magic of the fae, into guns when needed. Now this insinuates he is fae, but who knows?... Things might not be what they seem.... As the comic progresses he'll be in and out of it, but by the end of the first arc you'll know what he is - but not who. That's a story for further down the line.

"Nightmare De Lacy is pretty much Tank Girl mixed with a Byronesque goth - she's the muscle in this double act - she likes large guns and has a silver bracelet with Cthuloid nanotech that can morph into pretty much any bladed weapon. Yet again, you know she's not 'human' - but it's not until later that you find out what or who she is.

"Then there's Billy. He's the 'everyman' of the comic—the teenager who discovers that not only is he special, but that fantastical creatures want him dead. As the story goes on he undergoes... changes.

"And then you have the supporters - in the first arc these include the Shattered Man, Alligator King, Jonny Cool and the Flickman - who I absolutely love writing - Dorothy and the land of Oz, The Jack of Spades, Deathboy and Jerry Cornelius."

And if that last name sounds familiar... well, it should if you're a reader of the works of *Michael Moorcock*, since the character is one of his most famous creations. "I spoke to *Michael Moorcock* and he was happy with us to use Jerry—as let's face it, multiverses and traveling through them is his thing," Lee said. "It was nice to have a more contemporary character around. Jerry pops up here and there, dependent on Moorcock's blessing."

Midnight Kiss has a special significance for Lee. "I have a great love for alternate world stories, and I love Celtic mythology and old tales, like Robin Hood and Arthurian Myth—and all of these figure quite strongly in the upcoming tales. For example we have a two-parter that works on the story of Nuadha of the Silver arm, and how his arm became Robin Hood's silver arrow - that kind of thing.

"And I had also wanted to revisit the Wizard of Oz—go back and have a civil war there, but there are several books already working into this, so I felt incorporating the elements that I wanted to use from my planned miniseries into this would be better - and as it is, it works far, far better and I'm incredibly happy on the way things are progressing."

Lee is finding ***Midnight Kiss*** to be a very different experience from his prior comics work on the ***Starship Troopers*** graphic novel series. "With ***Starship Troopers***, I had to stick to a very tight guideline as my graphic novels had to mirror an established continuity that people knew. Likewise my ***X-Men Unlimited*** story. With these, I knew I only had a finite space for my beginning, middle and end... With ***Midnight Kiss***, I can do whatever the hell I want. It's ongoing - and the only thing that will determine the book living or dying is sales.

Midnight Kiss #1 is slated for late July release.

Boilerplate Shifts Gears in Heartbreakers Crossover

He's a 19th century robot back in action after almost eight decades on the shelf... and he's about to cross paths with a group of female action-hero clones in an state-of-the-art turn-of-the-century-styled adventure!

Boilerplate, the antiquated mechanical man created by artist *Paul Guinan*, teams up with *Anina Bennett's* ***Heartbreakers*** in the appropriately-entitled ***Heartbreakers Meet Boilerplate***. The book is illustrated in Guinan's unique art style that he calls "paintography," which is a combination of drawing, painting, and photography, enhanced by printing in rich brown ink, to achieve a look that simply must be seen to be believed. "Other comics have used photo-based art, but so far it's always looked clunky," Guinan explained. "I wanted to find a way of truly integrating the different media and giving it a more cohesive look—and I did it! I kind of surprised myself, in fact.

Bennett not only pens this brand new tale, but she also pulls double (or should that be *triple*?) duty by appearing as the heroines themselves! "I'm secretly a big ham," Bennett said, "so this is a great way to satisfy my acting jones. The only tricky part is pulling off some of the action poses. Try holding still for the camera while you're being blown through the air by an explosion or throwing a roundhouse kick!"

When Boilerplate, lost since World War I, is found and reassembled by the Heartbreakers, robot love quickly blooms with their android, Femiquin 44. But all is not sweetness and light, as

rogue researchers from Biovoc, the Heartbreakers' former corporate owner and nemesis, set their sights on dismantling the mechanical man to discover the valuable technology hidden inside.

Heartbreakers Meet Boilerplate intersperses a seventy-three-page story with historical background on Boilerplate, including period photos. Look for the 104-page digest-sized graphic novel in June.

Cracked Addiction?

Mad Magazine*'s** only surviving competitor in the comics satire-humor field has a new lease on life: an investment consortium has bought ***Cracked and has created a new company, Cracked Entertainment, Inc., to return the magazine to its glory days under the direction of new publisher *Monty Sarhan*.

Almost a half-century old, ***Cracked*** had seen a decline in sales in recent years after a change in ownership and a move to a bimonthly schedule. The new owners plan to revive ***Cracked*** through a complete redesign, a new editorial focus and an eventual return to publishing the magazine on a monthly basis. The company refused to reveal details of ***Cracked*** new look, stating only that it will break with the magazine's pure illustrated format and transform it into a full-color glossy featuring a mix of material (perhaps a bit of the ***National Lampoon*** approach?).

"***Cracked*** is more than a magazine. It is a successful forty-seven-year-old brand in the comedy space," Sarhan said. "Few brands have had that kind of longevity, and we will seek not only to build on ***Cracked*'s** past accomplishments, but also to reposition and re-imagine the brand and to achieve even greater success.... We need to focus first and foremost on content creation, and then on delivery of that content through multiple channels." Sarhan is optimistic that the changes will create a new generation of ***Cracked*** addicts for the 21st century.

Ins & Outs

Out! ***Atomika #1,*** the *Sal Abbinanti-Andrew Dabb* story set in an authoritarian alternate reality, sold out of its first printing. Speakeasy Comics has announced a second printing, which will feature a variation on the *Alex Ross* first printing cover.

Out! ***Wonder Woman #214,*** the second part of a ***Flash-Wonder Woman*** crossover, sold out from DC upon release. No plans for a second printing.

Out! The Little Lulu cover edition of the ***Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide Volume 35*** hardcover has sold out almost immediately upon release. The Iron Man cover edition of the hardcover is still available, as are both covers in the paperback edition.

In! New coloring for the cover art on *Brad Meltzer, Rags Morales, & Michael Bair's* ***Identity Crisis Final Printings #s 1-7.*** While DC is re-presenting the original *Michael Turner-Peter Steigerwald* art, the work is being recolored with a striking red background for each image. "These new covers make the ***Final Printing*** stand out from any previous printings," *Bob Wayne*, VP—Sales, said. This is the last time the books will be offered until a collected edition is released in September; look for the ***Final Printings*** to appear throughout the month of April.

Out! the videogame-inspired comic ***Freedom Force #2,*** which has sold out from Image Comics. " "This is fantastic news," said *Ken Levine*, general manager of Irrational Games (creators of the videogame). "It just goes to show that comic book readers still love comics that are fun and action-packed. Readers and retailers alike should be keeping a close eye on this series, because we've got a number exciting things coming up. For the sixth issue, I'll be penning a very special ten-page backup story with art by the video game's lead artist, *Robb Waters*. Later this year, we'll be exploring the untold origins of various Freedom Force members, including the never-before-told origin of the android, Microwave. After that, our plans are to continue on with a follow-up featuring all-new adventures that really flesh out the world of ***Freedom Force.***"

Tell Me Something Good

Free Comic Book Day is approaching on May 7th, and ***CSN #933*** will be a special FCBD issue designed to help turn on readers, new and old alike, to some of the best comics out there. And that's why we're asking you, the readers of ***CSN,*** to offer your own recommendations!

We'd like to include reader recommendations of the best comics, and we're hoping that you'll send us your faves lists. We're looking for the three best in each of the following categories—and if you want, you can add a line or two explaining what makes 'em so good!

(1) Three best comics for new readers
(2) Three best graphic novels/collected editions for new readers
(3) Three best manga for new readers
(4) Best collections of classic material—comic book or comic strip
(5) Best all-ages material for young readers

Send your recommendations and comments to *fcbd@comicshopnews.com* and check out ***Comic Shop News #933*** to see what you and the rest of our readers have recommended!

Quick Takes

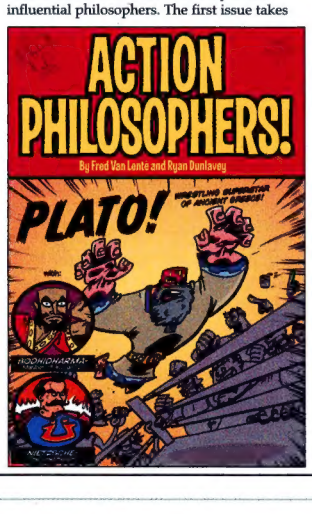
by Cliff Biggers

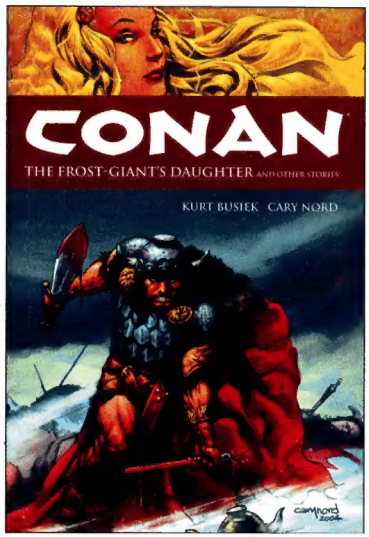
Action Philosophers! #1

Fred Van Lente (W); Ryan Dunlavey (A)
(Evil Twin Comics $2.95)

If you enjoyed *Larry Gonick's* ***Cartoon History of the Universe,*** you're going to feel right at home with this clever, irreverent, and informative look at some of history's most influential philosophers. The first issue takes on Plato, Bodhidharma, and Nietzsche, with mixed results. The Plato chapter is superb; Bodhidharma glosses over some concepts with insufficient attention; and Nietzsche ultimately proves entirely too complex for the six pages devoted to his philosophies. Caveats notwithstanding, ***Action Philosophers!*** still does a laudable job of bringing to life some complex ideas and putting them in a historical perspective without ever seeming overly "educational."

Grade - B+





Conan: The Frost Giant's Daughter & Other Stories

Kurt Busiek (W); Cary Nord & Tom Yeates (A)
(Dark Horse, $24.95 HC/$15.95 TP)

If you have the opportunity, spring for the hardcover on this one. Dark Horse has produced a remarkably handsome book that surpasses the quality of the average hardcover collection: foil-embossed fabric casing, a sewn binding, heavy-weight interior stock, full-bleed artwork (no comment on the swordsmanship there—"full bleed" means that the art goes all the way to the edge of the paper with no white border), and each copy is hand-signed by *Kurt Busiek*. The lavish painted art evokes the feel of a vintage Wyeth-illustrated volume, while the material itself is admirably faithful to *Robert E. Howard's* original Conan vision. Be warned that the hardcover is quite limited and quite underpriced for a signed volume, so it's likely to go quickly; if the hardcover is sold out, you won't go wrong with the trade paperback, which offers the same material on the same heavy paper with the same quality reproduction.

Grade - A+

X-Files Volume One TP

Stefan Petrucha (W); Charles Adlard (A)
(Checker $19.95)

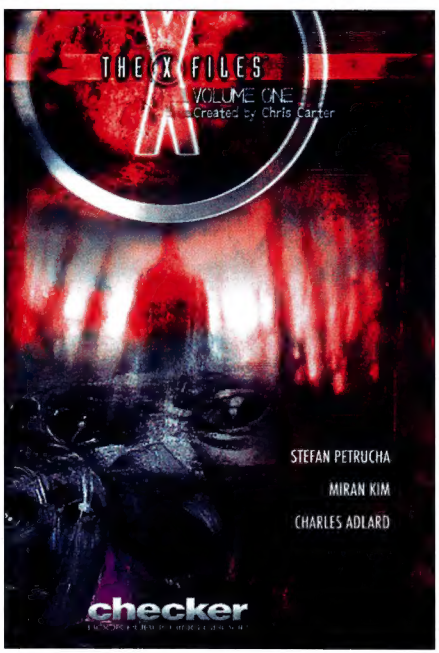
Checker begins its full-color reprinting of Topps 1990's X-Files series with ***X-Files #13,*** picking up where Topps' two ***X-Files*** volumes left off. Let's hope that the eventually back up and reissue those first twelve issues in matching editions as well, so that we can have an entire set of these well-crafted television-series-inspired stories in the uniformly high quality editions that Checker always delivers. Petrucha's stories are every bit as good as—and sometimes better than—the series that inspired them; Adlard's art, while much less sophisticated than his contemporary work, is nonetheless solid and competent. The weak point of the collection is an episode adaptation; I could have done without it, but Checker's desire to offer the entire series is understandable, and that means that episode adaptations have to be included. While there's nothing ground-breaking here, this is well-crafted complement to any ***X-Files*** collection.

—Grade - B+

Steve Ditko's Space Wars

Steve Ditko (W/A)
(Vanguard Productions $34.95 HC/$16.95 TP)

Ditko's skill with twist-ending science fiction and fantasy earned the quirky creator a reputation as the Rod Serling of comics in the late 50's and early 60's. It's a shame that the Silver Age superhero boom pushed this sort of story out of the spotlight; as good as Ditko's superhero work was, it never compared with his tightly-plotted short sf and fantasy pieces. This collection features an assortment of Ditko tales produced for Charlton Comics between 1954 and 1961. The earliest story, "Dead Reckoning," spotlights the early work of a talent still in development. The later stories are every bit as appealing visually as Ditko's Marvel work from the same time period; it's obvious that the creator never compromised his artistry, no matter how low the paycheck. Not all of the stories hold together as well, however; some of them seem rushed and awkwardly told, and one story, "Way Out Man"

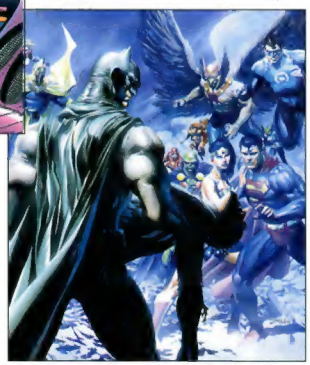


(the latest story in the volume), seems absolutely pointless—it's as if the beat-culture satire was the only idea Ditko had, and he didn't know what to do with it. Even so, this is a must-have volume for fans of Ditko's work, and we can only hope that Marvel eventually puts together some pre-hero compilations featuring more of Ditko's work from these genres. Reproduction quality is mixed; it appears they had black and white copies of some of these stories to work from, while others had to be restored from printed copies of the book.
Grade - B

DC: Countdown to Infinite Crisis #1

Geoff Johns, Greg Rucka, & Judd Winick (W);. Rags Morales, Ed Benes, Phil Jimenez, Ivan Reis, Jesus Saiz, & others (A); Cover by Jim Lee & Alex Ross
(DC $1.00)

Too bad Scully and Mulder don't operate in the DC Universe—there are some conspiracies here that they'd have a field day with! ***Countdown*** paves the way for five major limited series—***The Omac Project, Day of Vengeance, Villains United, The Rann/Thanagar War,*** and ***The Return of Donna Troy***—but it alludes to something potentially more groundbreaking that's coming after that. The story



starts off with a major revelation of an ominous force in the DC Universe that threatens every superhero; before it's over, one DCU veteran will gain an insight into the truth... and will pay the ultimate price for his discovery. While this is the work of three different writers and more than a half-dozen artists, the creators have carefully blended their styles in such a way that the book avoids any jarring stylistic changes, conveying a unity of voice and style that propels this eighty-page story straight ahead unrelentingly. It's obvious that 2005 is going to be a major year at DC; they've found a way to transcend last year's ***Identity Crisis*** with a multifold saga keeps the excitement building.
Grade—A

A Bit of Madness

Emmanuel Civiello (W/A)
(Checker $24.95)

Checker launches a line of upscale European translations with this remarkable fantasy quest tale that blends elements of *J.R.R. Tolkien, Brian Froud,* and *Dave McKean*. The star of the series is a big-nosed elf named Igguk, a reluctant hero who must find the Heart of Crystal before it falls into the hands of the Lord of Darkness. The story, while derivative in the way that so many grand fantasy tales are nowadays, is entertaining, but it's the art that makes it such a memorable reading experience; Civiello's style is captivating, showing a seldom-seen artistic sophistication that makes this book a visual treat.
Grade—A-

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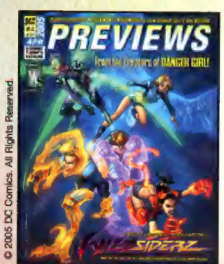
ON THE COVERS ...



Wildsiderz #0 — *Danger Girl* creators J. Scott Campbell and artist Andy Hartnell return with a new team of young heroes for the 21st century!

Hellboy: The Island #1 — Award-winning creator Mike Mignola presents the long-awaited sequel to 2001's *The Third Wish*; the first new **Hellboy** series since the character starred in his own 2004 feature film!

500+ pages of cool stuff that starts shipping in June!

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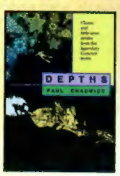
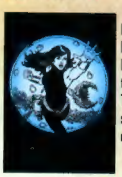
CHECK OUT THESE OFFERINGS:

Concrete Volume 1: Depths! Dark Horse Comics takes us back to the beginning of Paul Chadwick's "thinking man's" sci-fi series with this trade paperback collecting the earliest stories along with some little-seen rarities!





DC Special: The Return of Donna Troy #1! This new limited series not only heralds the return of the former Teen Titan to the DCU, it also sets the stage for a major cross-over event for 2005!

Invincible: The Ultimate Collection Volume 1 HC! Robert Kirkman's hit superhero series gets the star treatment with this hardcover edition collecting the first 13 issues of the Eisner-nominated series!

Fantastic Four Omnibus Volume 1 HC! A landmark edition collecting the first three years of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's groundbreaking series, plus special features and the best reproduction of *Fantastic Four* #1 ever!

AND BE SURE NOT TO MISS:

- **Bear & Looshkin Plushes** from Amaze Ink/Slave Labor!
- **Red Sonja #1** from D.E.!
- **Shaun of the Dead #1** from IDW Publishing!
- **Battlestar Galactica: Official Companion** in the Books Section!
- **Family Guy: 12" Talking Stewie** in the Toys Section!
- **G.I. Joe: Snake Eyes Wall Statue** in the Statues & Models Section!

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Red K Awards

Episode XV: Revenge of the Readers

Back in December, *CSN* offered its ***Red K Awards*** for achievement, dubious or otherwise. We asked you to mail us your ***Red K*** choices for the past year's comic book highlights and low-lights, and that's just what you did! We received hundreds of responses again this year—and here are the *creme de la creme*, selected by *CSN*'s staff.

The "Take My Wife... Please" Award

Women of the DC Universe

"Sue Dibney got murdered, Jean Loring went crazy, Lois Lane got shot, Linda Park-West went AWOL - 2004 was a *bad* time to be married to a DC Comics super-hero in the DC universe!"
—*Dominic Sheehan*

The "First Things First" Award

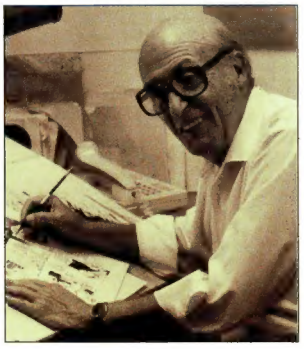
IDW Publishing

"What great news for those of us who remember this great publisher from the 1980s. First (no pun intended) IDW brings back Ostrander & Truman's ***Grimjack***, offering both classic reprints and new material, and then they do the same thing with *Mike Grell's* ***Jon Sable, Freelance***. Way to go, guys—and keep up the good work!"
—*Bernie Kantmann*

The "Thor-oughly Satisfying Ending" Award

Thor #85

"Even though all of us know this won't truly be the end of Thor, it had the feeling of a truly epic end that captured all the majesty of the Asgardian saga that Lee & Kirby created in the 1960s..."
—*Miguel Vizuete*



The "Will Power" Award

Will Eisner

"The death of this comics great made it all to clear just what a major figure he was in the comics field. Even though he was long past the age when most creators have abandoned comics, Eisner continued to work tirelessly, and even though he's gone now we still can look forward to at least one more major graphic novel in 2005 from the master. Thank you, Mr. Eisner."
—*Keith Gunderman*

The "Stop the Revolutions, I Want to Get Off" Award

Matrix Comics TPB

"As much as ***Matrix: Revolutions*** sucked, that's how good the Burlyman ***Matrix Comics*** collections are. Maybe we can convince everyone the film was just an artificial cinematic reality created by a cyber-intelligence?..."
—*Edward Coombs*

The "Too Much of a Good Thing" Award

Transformers

"Dreamwave is out of business now, and that's a shame, but they caused a lot of their problems by putting out so many ***Transformers*** books that it was hard for readers to keep up with all the different storylines and series. Don't overdo it, publishers!..."
—*Fletch Shreiner*

The "Fool Me Once..." Award

Rob Liefeld

"Why is it that every few months, Rob Liefeld feels the need to solicit comics like he's actually going to become a responsible publisher again, only to screw it up by never putting out any comics?... Why do distributors even let him list comics until he can prove they actually exist?"
—*Wendell Jenkins*

The "Avenge Me" Award

The New Avengers

"Say what you want about how the old title ended—the buzz surrounding this book got me to buy a Marvel comic for the first time in thirty years of collecting...."
—*Dominic Sheehan*

The "Avengers and JLA Assembled" Award

JLA:Avengers Slipcased HC

"The best comics collection of the year, featuring the best comic book story and art of the year. Too bad Marvel and DC can't put their differences behind them and do more stuff this good!"
—*Emmy Saltzer*

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You want the best? We've got it! This month's *Previews* is chock-full of incredible toys, models, and more, with a selection of genres from the hottest comics to the coolest movies and beyond! Quality, diversity, variety...only in *Previews*!

Check out the April *PREVIEWS*, on sale March 23rd, for everything you see here!

- Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Übervamp Bust
- G.I. Joe: Snake Eyes Wall Statue
- Marvel Milestones: Wolverine on Skulls Statue
- Marvel Minimates Series 10 & 11 2-Packs
- Marvel Universe: Man-Thing Bust
- Marvel Universe: Werewolf By Night Bust
- Silver Age Fantastic Four Diorama Series: Invisible Woman Medium Statue
- Transformers: Autobot Logo Wall Plaque

- Alias Magazine 2005 Yearbook PX Cover Ed.
- All That Jazz PX Limited Edition Signed Print
- Angel Magazine #10 PX Cover Ed.
- Battlestar Galactica Official Companion TP PX Cover Ed.
- Deistar Beginner Tone Sets "S" & "T"
- Eye Candy Manga PX Cover Ed.
- Fantastic Four Official Movie Magazine PX Cover Ed.
- How to Draw Manga: Anime & Game Illustration Kit
- How to Draw Manga: Computones Vol. 3
- How to Draw Manga: Ultimate Manga Lessons #3
- Inu-Yasha: Sesshomaru Stand PX T-Shirt
- The Lexian Chronicles: Full Circle #1 PX Red Foil Cover Ed.
- Mr.T #1 PX Gold Foil Cover Ed.
- Namco Girls mini-figure Asst. #2
- Naughty Jane XXX PX Ltd. Ed. Signed Print
- Red Sonja #1
- Shi: Ju-Nen #3 Signed Graphite Ed.
- Six from Sirius Vol. 1 TP PX Cover Ed.
- Stargate SG-1 Magazine #5 PX Cover Ed.
- Tarot: Witch of the Black Rose Vol. 3 PX Ltd. Ed. TP
- Wild Cherry's Tease PX Cover Ed.

- Batman B&W Series: Brian Bolland Mini-Statue
- Batman: The Long Halloween Series 1:
  - Batman Action Figure
  - Catwoman Action Figure
  - Joker Action Figure
  - Mad Hatter Action Figure
  - Two-Face Action Figure
- Grim Adventures of Billy & Mandy Statue
- Identity Crisis Series 1:
  - Deadshot Action Figure
  - Doctor Light Action Figure
  - Green Arrow Action Figure
  - Hawkman Action Figure
  - Zatanna Action Figure
- Justice League Unlimited: Black Canary Maquette
- Krypto & Friends Animated Series Maquette Set
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The "Stranger Than Fiction" Award

Strangers In Paradise

"*Terry Moore's* long-running human interest drama remains one of my must-read titles because Moore has captured the essence of real women in his stories. Every time a friend has told me she thought comics were silly, I've loaned her my ***SiP*** collections and she's become a convert."
—*Patricia Smith*

Flip Flop Writer of the Year Award

J. Michael Straczynski.

"I can't figure it. In one ***Amazing Spider-Man*** story arc, JMS will give us the best Peter Parker in years. Then he'll do off the wall stuff like Spidey hanging out with a hot-dog eating Loki and Gwen Stacey giving birth to twins by Norman Osborn. Come on, JMS, you can do better. Next thing you know, he'll be giving Spidey organic web-shooters. Oh, wait...."
—*Michael Weyer*

The "Enough Is Enough" Award

Avatar Comics

"These guys might have a few books I would read, but I can never remember if I have them or not because they put out so many different covers for every book that I finally just gave up. After I bought the same issue of ***Robocop*** three times because of all the various covers and rereleases, I realized that I could do better spending my comic book money on another publisher..."
—*Jerry Carrozza*

The "Throw Out This Disc" Award

Identity Disc

How do you hide the fact that you're trying to rip off a popular film like ***The Usual Suspects?*** If you're Marvel, you just try to rip off the name of a hit DC series and call your book ***Identity Disc*** and try to release it at the very same time. Maybe it should have been called 'We're filed next to ***Identity Crisis*** in hopes you'll get confused and buy this.'"
—*Bill Fowler*

The "Stranger Than Fiction" Award

Lovecraft GN

"Anyone who has ever read *H.P. Lovecraft's* work has always suspected that he knew more about the supernatural than real life. As this story suggests that may not be too 'out there' an idea!
—*Tony Bowers*

The "Meet Your Maker" Award

Fantastic Four # 511

"The Fantastic Four enter the afterlife and meet the almighty who turns out to be none other than *Jack Kirby*!! How appropriate is that?"
—*Tony Bowers*

The "Ellis Irony" Award

Ocean & Planetary

"*Warren Ellis* signs and exclusive with Marvel, but his best work of 2004 is appearing from DC. ***Ocean*** is everything that Ellis does well, and ***Planetary*** is still the most imaginative comic in the WildStorm Universe."
—*Luis Morales*

The "It May Be Millar's World, But I Don't Want to Live In It" Award

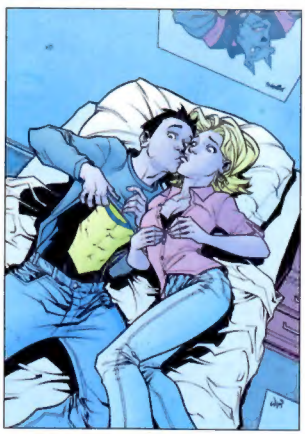
Mark Millar's Wanted

"In an empty attempt to craft the most anti of anti-heroes, Millar's series ends with no real resolution while disturbingly implying that there is a chic appeal to brutal rape and mass murder. Whereas some writers are able to orchestrate complex adult themes to encourage political introspection, Millar comes across like a five-year-old trying to use curse words for the first time and seems ignorant of the emotional resonance of his content. By the end of the series, the reader is left feeling as if they have been forced to endure the closest comics can come the thankless feel of a snuff film."
—*Richard Reagan*

The "Too Cool for School" Award

The Intimates

"The premise of this one sounds great, but somehow it just doesn't work. J. Torres managed to capture that high school feel in his teen-super-hero-school ***Sidekicks***. Maybe Casey, Lee, & Camuncoli have been out of the classroom for too long..."
—*Ralph Stancliff*



The "Rayner Day" Award

Kyle Rayner

"As for Hal Jordan coming back as Green Lantern, I keep coming back to what the Blue Devil said in a *James Robinson* ***Starman*** issue years ago: 'Here's to that *other* Green Lantern who isn't Hal Jordan and they *still* treat him like a big cheese!" Like most funny things, so wonderfully true. Kyle did his best, but no matter what story was built around him, he remained as bland as white bread..."
—*Charles Brown*

The "Sometimes You're Gwen, Sometimes You Lose" Award

Gwen Stacy

"This poor woman; she gets killed by Ultimate Carnage in ***Ultimate Spider-Man*** at about the same time that she's reinvented as an amoral slut in ***Amazing Spider-Man.*** Let's hope that the whole 'sleeping with Norman Osborn' thing is one part of the Marvel Universe Spider-Man that *Brian Bendis* doesn't feel the need to appropriate.'"
—*Karin Friedman*

The "From the Depths" Award

Aquaman

"Along with *Peter David*, *Will Pfeifer* can boast what no one else can: making ***Aquaman*** cool as hell. The brilliant idea of 'Sub Diego,' an underwater city of newly made mer-people, gave the character more life than he's had in years—and Pfeifer added to it with ideas like old Aquaman foe the Eel trying to set up a crime ring in the city. Pfeifer may be gone, but his impact will make waves for a while to come."
—*Michael Weyer*

The "We All Came To Look for America" Award

Captain America Lives Again

"The best ***Captain America*** story in the past ten years... the *only* story in this century that captures the essence of Cap... and it's totally out of print at Marvel. Come on, guys, put *Dave Gibbons & Lee Weeks'* book out again so that you can give it to today's creators so that they can know what Cap is *supposed* to be like."
—*Greg Schueler*

The "Schwartz Was Right" Award

DC Silver Age Reboots

Flash gets back to the character's super-speed roots and his rogues gallery; ***Adam Strange*** takes the man of two worlds back to his science fiction adventure roots; ***Green Lantern: Rebirth*** restores Hal Jordan to his original glory. Hey, guys, ya shouldn't have screwed around with what Julie did to begin with!..."
—*Peter Haas*

Cancellation Blues (Or Purples)

Thanos

"*Keith Giffen & Ron Lim* came aboard ***Thanos*** after *Jim Starlin's* departure, offering amazing insight info Marvel's infamous anti-hero and a comprehensive perspective of the cosmic branch of the Marvel Universe to the ailing series. The Beyonder! Galactus! The Shi'ar Guard! *Please* let Giffen continue on ***Thanos***—or let him take on the ***Silver Surfer***!"
Jay B. Kalagayan

The "All Biographies Otto Be This Good" Award

Words of Wonder! Life & Times of Otto Binder

"*Bill Schelly* has produced the first truly insightful biography of a comic book creator. Most of what passes for biography in this field is little more than a career resumé and a few interview highlights. ***Words of Wonder*** towers over everything that has come before, raising the mark for anyone who follows..."
—*Roger Bezdek*

The "It's a Small World After All" Award

Neal Adams' A Conversation Between Two Guys in a Bar (Or A New Model of the Universe)

"Where is this bold new scientific breakthrough in graphic novel form that *Neal Adams* has been talking about for the past few years? Has he finally realized how wacky the science was after a noted magazine refuted a lot of his claims, or is he just unable to make deadlines... even his own?"
—*Dan Woltman*

The "Legion of Super-Story" Award

I Am Legion! The Dancing Faun

"*Fabien Nury & John Cassaday* turned out one of the year's best original graphic novels, but it got almost no attention thanks to the mega-success of superhero projects like ***Identity Crisis, Superman, Astonishing X-Men,*** and ***Avengers Disassembled.*** Don't miss this great story that blends wartime drama and superhuman adventure. Can't wait for these guys to do another graphic novel in this series!"
—*Diane Luttrell*

The "Will Tomorrow Ever Come?" Award

"Superman! For Tomorrow"

"This has been a beautiful series visually, but what a slow read! Azzarello could have told this story in three issues and it might have worked; it certainly isn't working as a twelve-issue story, though..."
—*Shelley Dacey*

The "Have Goon Will Travel" Award

The Goon

"It's like a cross between ***Popeye*** and ***Swamp Thing,*** with a dose of offbeat humor. *Eric Powell* has created a unique and thoroughly entertaining character—plus, he beats up zombies!"
—*Ryan Reed*

Back to Basics Award

Thunderbolts

"First an excellent series of villains seeking redemption is brought to a very open ending (smart move by the way). Then the book is turned into something so different from the original concept that only the title had any resemblance to the original comic. What were they thinking? Well Marvel finally got their act together and the original concept of the Thunderbolts is back and better than ever!

—Bob Sobocinski

The "MIA" Award

Sgt. Fury & His Howling Commandos

"This is the only major Marvel Silver Age book that isn't available in either an Essential or a Masterwork. Add it to your schedule, Marvel, and you'll hear a lot of us yelling 'wa-HOO!'"

—Scott Douthit

The "Mad As Hell and I'm Not Going to Take It AnyMore" Award

Late comics

"I'm sick and tired of writers and artists who think they're too good to make deadlines. We have to wait months in between issues of a series, and even quarterly series like ***Secret War*** can't even make an every-three-months deadline. Maybe it's time for all these prima donnas to get a real job and make room for some people who are willing to treat comics like a job! These *are* called 'periodicals,' you know..."

—Joe Tomey

The "Night Has Fallen" Award

Silver Surfer

"Marvel tried to rip off that whole *M. Night Shyamalan* vibe with ***Silver Surfer***, with disastrous consequences. What seems weird and disturbing in our world is an everyday part of the Marvel Universe, so the presence of a silvery space alien doesn't generate much of a sense of wonder there. Now that this dismal era in ***Silver Surfer*** history is over and done with, let's get back to the cosmic Surfer as Lee & Kirby envisioned him!"

—George Dirnberger

And once again, the winner and still champion—*Steve Chung*! Steve supplied us with a wide variety of Red K Awards; here are the highlights of this year's offerings:

The "Well Worth The Wait" Award

Fantastic Four

"With the cover price of Fantastic Four raised from $2.25 to $2.99, I find that the book is still worth the price for the stories by the creative team of Mark and Mike."

The "Mad About You" Award

"The League of Rejected Super-Heroes" by *Jeff Kruse* in ***Mad Magazine #438,*** with art *by Art Adams, Mike Allred, John Byrne, Dave Gibbons, John Romita Jr.*, and a cover by *Bruce Timm*

"What super-hero fan could pass this up?"

The "Strange Adventures" Award

Adam Strange Archives Vol 1 HC

"With the new miniseries out now, it's nice to see a collection of stories from ***Showcase #s 17-19*** and ***Mystery In Space #s 53-65*** by *Gardner Fox, Mike Sekowsky, Carmine Infantino, & Bernard Sachs*. Thankfully, fans don't have to wait for the Zeta-Beam to be able to savor these classic stories."

The "The Best Kept Secret" Award

Superman! Secret Identity by Kurt Busiek & Stuart Immonen

"What would it be like for the Man of Steel to exist in the real world? An excellent miniseries and the best Superman story in a long time by Busiek and Immonen."

The "Flight Of Fancy" Award

Alpha Flight

"The third time's the charm for the Canadian super-team with *Scott Lobdell & Clayton Henry* at the plate."

And there you have it—another year's ***Readers Red K Awards*** wrapped up. So now it's time to start taking notes for *next year's* awards! And judging from the first four months, there's going to be plenty to work with!...

RED SONJA RETURNS!
RED SONJA
SHE-DEVIL WITH A SWORD
MICHAEL TURNER
PAOLO RIVERA
JOSEPH MICHAEL LINSNER
JOHN CASSADAY
ALEX ROSS
RED SONJA #1
Michael Avon Oeming (Co-Writer) and Mike Carey (Co-Writer); Mel Rubi (Artist); Caesar Rodriguez (Co-Colorist) and Richard Isanove (Co-Colorist); Covers by Michael Turner, Paolo Rivera, Joseph Michael Linser, John Cassaday, and Alex Ross.
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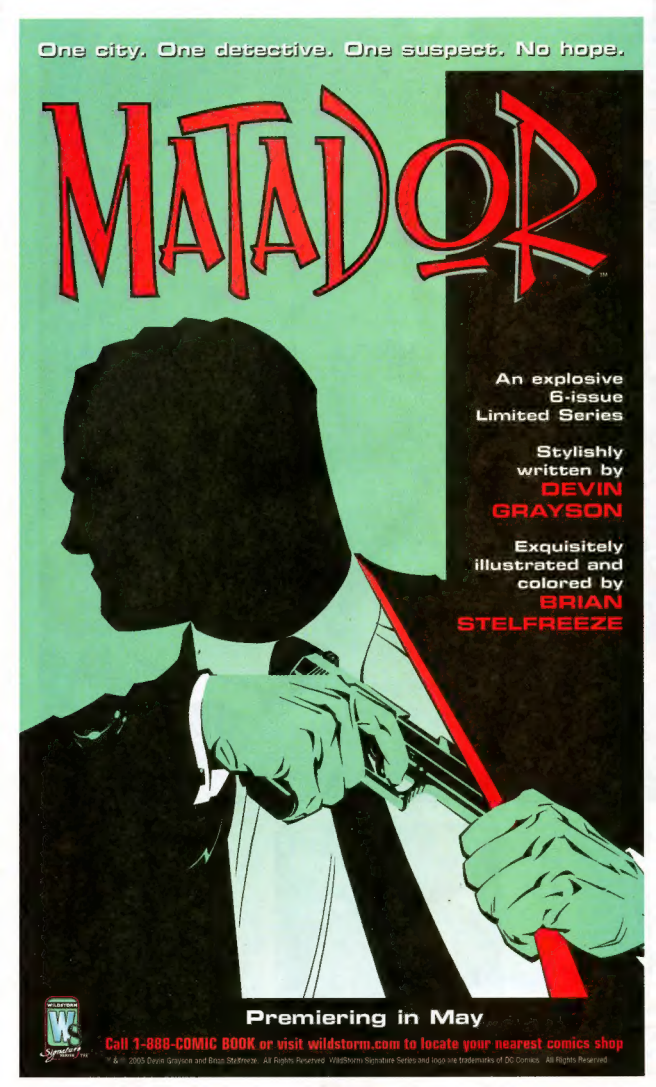
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